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"Mr. Boyd Goes to Bosnia"

On March 5th, at the request of Speaker Gingrich and Minority Leader Gephardt, I joined nine of my House colleagues on a four day, fact-finding trip to Bosnia-Herzegovina. Our mission was to explore the current situation in Bosnia and report back to Congress as it prepares a response to the President's request to maintain U.S. troops in that region. As a member of the National Security Committee, I have received numerous classified briefings regarding America's presence in Bosnia, but I still had serious questions about whether the U.S. should continue to participate in the international peace-keeping efforts in the region. This journey brought me new insight into this complicated situation, and I would like to share my perspective with you.

All of us have seen pictures on TV of the death and destruction that conflict has brought to Bosnia, but physically standing in the war-riddled city of Sarajevo was overwhelming. It is difficult to imagine how a city that hosted the Winter Olympics just 14 years ago could be reduced to a site of burned down homes, crumbling streets, and charred remains of businesses.

Even more difficult to understand is that the deep-seeded beliefs and sentiments which led to this horrible war are still alive in the minds of people in this region. During a visit to a re-settlement camp in Stari Rasadnik, the delegation met with a group of both Bosnians and Serbs. In 15 short minutes, a seemingly positive dialogue between the groups turned into a shouting match over the relocation of refugees in their homelands. These arguments, however, are not merely based on war-time disputes, but are born from an ethnic and religious rivalry that has existed for hundreds of years and, today, still permeates every facet of life in this region. With these diverse ethnic groups living so closely to one another, the potential for conflict weighs heavily on Bosnia.

To counter this constant threat of war, the U.S. has been participating in peace-keeping efforts in the region. The basic mission of these peace-keepers is to prevent further armed conflict in Bosnia. But during my trip, I began to understand our greater purpose: to prevent war from spreading though Europe.

During my briefings and over the course of my visit to Bosnia, I began to comprehend the magnitude of the international threat that this regional conflict poses. During the war, thousands of Bosnians and Serbs fled their homeland to become refugees in neighboring European countries like Germany, France, Greece, Albania, Turkey, and Macedonia, making the Bosnian conflict a domestic issue for these nations. Should war return to Bosnia, the presence of Bosnian and Serb refugees throughout Europe, combined with the economic and financial interests that European nations and America have vested in this region, could cause this conflict to spread like a cancer from Bosnia throughout all of Europe.

Both World War I and World War II began in this troubled region. At the time, the conflicts that initiated these wars were considered isolated, regional incidents; but resulting strife rapidly

spread through Europe and eventually reached the rest of the world. These days, international diplomatic and economic alliances bring the threat of a European confrontation to America's doorstep, and increase the chances of history repeating itself. After discussions with Ambassadors Kauzlarich, Farrand, and Foglietta, our stake in this conflict and the need for our nation to assist in preventing another war in Bosnia, became clear to me. The United States is the only remaining world superpower, and with that title comes a capability and a responsibility to protect international peace. Brave Americans gave their lives for this peace; we owe it to those who died, and to their children, to protect that peace.

I believe our presence in Bosnia is critical and has been the key element in preserving the peace. While resettling displaced Bosnians and Serbs in their home territories is challenging, the people have hope that war is over. Residents of Sarajevo are beginning to rebuild, refugees are returning home, and businesses are making a comeback. During my time in Banja Luka, Mrs. Biljana Plavsic, the President of the Republicka of Srpska (the Serb Republic), and I discussed her efforts to establish a democratic system of government. Her determination gave hope that democracy will grant these diverse people the ability to live and work together.

My journey to Bosnia, and the top secret briefings I received, gave me a different perspective on the Bosnian conflict and our role in keeping peace in that very crucial European region. Our soldiers--our sons and daughters, fathers and mothers--are in Bosnia because United States citizens have a stake in whether democracy succeeds or fails. We must recognize that failure is tantamount to war--a war which has no European boundaries.

During my stay, I met with U.S. commanders in Bosnia, including General Clark, the Supreme Allied Commander of Europe, and General Shinseki, the Commander for SFOR. I am no longer doubtful: our troops in Bosnia are under complete U.S. control and command, and they have been deployed for a worthy cause. I want my constituents and the families of those brave soldiers to know that as their Congressman I will continue to support legislation which promotes civil reform in Bosnia, strengthens their democratic processes, and enables Bosnians to govern themselves and provide their own security with less assistance from the U.S. and other NATO nations.